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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRAGUE 000139

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2018

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SUBJECT: CZECH CHAIRMAN OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ON
MISSILE DEFENSE

REF: 07 PRAGUE 1156

Classified By: POL/ECON COUNSELOR MICHAEL DODMAN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: Jan Hamacek, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Czech Parliament, recently shared with us views on a broad range of topics, including missile defense (MD), Afghanistan, relations with the Topolanek government, and contacts with countries like Iran and Russia.

On MD, Hamacek indicated that he expects a protracted ratification process of about five to six months, with the government taking the MD agreements to parliament only when it is assured of victory. To achieve victory, Hamacek stated that a political deal will have to be struck between PM Topolanek and opposition leader Jiri Paroubek, confirming our assessment. Hamacek, who is a prominent foreign policy expert of the opposition Social Democratic Party (CSSD), will be traveling with five members of his committee to the United States in April and is requesting our assistance with his visit. End Summary.

Missile Defense

22. (C) Hamacek, as a key voice in the opposition CSSD on foreign policy matters, has been following missile defense closely and has always carefully toed the CSSD policy line on MD. However, in our February 27 discussion, Hamacek seemed to be more forward-leaning than we have seen in the past. He sought to assure us that CSSD is fully aware of the progress in U.S.-Czech relations over the past several years, under both CSSD and ODS-led governments, implying that CSSD would not want to reverse that progress. In Hamacek's view, PM Topolanek needs to reach out to Paroubek and have a serious discussion on MD and hammer out a political deal. Comment: This coincides with our assessment that the key to passing MD in the Czech parliament will likely be a political deal between the two leaders, given that it is unclear whether all deputies of the Green Party and KDU-CSL, the two smaller coalition partners, would support MD. End Comment.

33. (C) Hamacek confirmed that at least some in the Topolanek government are reaching out to the opposition. He met with DPM Alexandr Vondra on February 26 to discuss a whole range of issues, including MD and the Lisbon treaty. According to Hamacek, he told Vondra that in the aftermath of the bruising presidential election, there is little good will toward ODS and the government within CSSD. In the context of the Lisbon treaty, this means the government should not rely on CSSD to provide the necessary votes to ratify it and help out Topolanek in an internal ODS fight. Note: Topolanek faces a problem with his own ODS, where its euroskeptical wing is expected to reject the treaty. End Note. Comment: Several

observers have suggested that one possible "deal" to win approval of MD could involve passage of the Lisbon treaty, which is a top CSSD priority. Hamacek,s comments indicate that the Topolanek government still has more work to do in laying the ground for a bargain along these lines. End Comment.

¶4. (C) With regard to timing of the ratification, Hamacek stated he was certain that the government would not submit the MD agreements to the parliament for ratification, unless and until it was sure the agreements would pass. In his opinion, the worst thing that could happen to U.S.-Czech relations -- and to the Topolanek government -- would be if the government submitted the agreements for ratification and they failed to pass. Hamacek thus left open the possibility that the government would not submit the agreements for a vote in late spring/early summer, the time frame that we anticipate, if it could not be certain of the result. In other words, the government might be forced to wait, whether because of problems within the coalition, possible delays in the Polish negotiations, the fall regional elections, or the U.S. elections.

¶5. (C) Hamacek sees a relatively long parliamentary process once the agreements are submitted for ratification, possibly as long as five or six months. According to Hamacek, the agreements will probably be reviewed by at least three committees (foreign affairs, defense, and constitutional affairs), and their hearings will take time. Note: All bills must pass three separate readings in the lower chamber of the parliament, and the usual period between the first and second readings is 60 days. The Senate, where the vote is not in doubt since the ruling ODS has a majority, may also take time to consider the agreements, given the controversy

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surrounding MD. End Note.

Afghanistan

¶6. (C) Although on MD Hamacek has been relatively careful, when it comes to Afghanistan, he has been a strong supporter of the Czech PRT in Logar and Czech assistance to Afghanistan. He was one of a handful of CSSD deputies who supported the PRT deployment in a December vote in the parliament. Hamacek even called himself a "dissident" within his party on this issue. Given his personal investment and interest in the PRT, Hamacek said that he would like to travel to Logar, if the opportunity arises.

¶7. (C) He was more cautious on the possible deployment of Czech special forces (SOF) to Afghanistan. Apparently, he had warned the government not to include the SOF deployment in the December legislative package on 2008 foreign deployments because it would have probably sunk the entire package. He advised the Ministry of Defense to do some more ground work in the parliament, especially with CSSD, if a SOF deployment is to become a reality.

Hamacek and CSSD Foreign Travel: The Good and The Bad

¶8. (C) Hamacek met with us on the day when the local media was seized with the story of Paroubek,s visit to Syria. Hamacek was visibly chagrined by the trip, which he told us he had to defend to the Czech media all day long (in fact, immediately after our meeting, he was facing another TV interview on the matter). To us, he noted that the Czech MFA knew about the trip and that other Czech officials (DFM Pojar, FinMin Kalousek) either traveled recently or will travel soon to Syria. Hamacek added that as PM, Paroubek traveled to several other countries in the region, and his visit to Syria would "complete the picture" for him. Despite these arguments, it was clear that Hamacek thought the trip was a bad move, sending the wrong message about CSSD,

especially since he had a hard time explaining why Paroubek traveled there. In Hamacek's words, "it was just a trip," but obviously a poorly planned one.

¶9. (C) Interestingly, Hamacek had a similar reaction to Paroubek's planned visit to Moscow in late March. Although he is listed as a member of the delegation, Hamacek told us that he was not sure that he would go with Paroubek. He was worried that the trip would be criticized in the media -- and by the government -- as CSSD asking the Russian government for guidance on how they should proceed on MD. Note: This criticism would, of course, remind all Czechs of the bad old days, when Czechoslovak leaders would be routinely summoned to Moscow and told what to do. Hamacek is therefore justified in his concern that the Moscow visit could deal another blow to CSSD's image. End Note.

¶10. (C) Another hot potato that Hamacek is trying to handle with care is a possible reciprocal visit to Iran. Hamacek admitted that the visit of Iranian Parliamentarian Majlis Alaeddin Boroujedi last fall was widely criticized and he was damaged politically by it (reftel). As a result, Hamacek is not planning to visit Iran in the near future, although he has been invited for a reciprocal visit. In addition to the controversy last fall, he said that he was concerned about the recent Iranian flare-up concerning the Danish cartoons. He also considers it more prudent to wait until there is greater clarity from IAEA on Iran's nuclear program.

¶11. (U) Hamacek is planning to take five members of his committee to the United States during April 5-13. His delegation will include: Deputy Chairman Tomas Dub (ODS), Petr Wolf (CSSD), Jan Schwippel (ODS), Helena Mallotova (ODS), and Milan Simonovsky (KDU-CSL). The trip is being coordinated by the Czech Consulate in New York and the Czech Embassy in Washington, but Hamacek requested our assistance with meetings at the State Department, Pentagon, MDA, and on Capitol Hill. In addition to Washington, Hamacek's delegation will also visit New York and Lincoln, Nebraska. Hamacek last visited Washington in spring 2007.

¶12. (U) In addition to the U.S. trip, Hamacek has a full schedule planned for 2008. He and several members of his committee leave this weekend for Azerbaijan and Turkey. A visit to Indonesia and East Timor is planned for May. This trip would focus on commercial issues, but Hamacek noted that he would like to visit East Timor and direct more Czech assistance to that country and the region. In the fall,

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Hamacek is planning two trips: 1) Mexico and Guatemala; and 2) Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Egypt.

COMMENT

¶13. (C) Hamacek is one of three key CSSD voices on foreign policy matters. Unlike his two party colleagues, Paroubek and Lubomir Zaoralek, Hamacek usually adopts a more reasonable and responsible approach. He told us during the meeting that he and a few others in CSSD are committed to working with the government on foreign policy priorities, which in his view should not be politicized (e.g. foreign deployments). However, he admitted that CSSD is torn between his more forthcoming approach and the camp of staunch left-wingers led by Zaoralek. Paroubek, whose position within CSSD is by no means secure and who will face a tough reelection as party chairman next year, increasingly appears preoccupied with protecting his left flank. On the other hand, Hamacek, a young politician who is not running in the fall regional elections or next year's party elections, has the luxury of taking a longer-term and less political approach to key foreign policy issues.

¶14. (C) Hamacek has never been an MD supporter. In this he is not just toeing the CSSD party line. He has taken the

time to study the issue in detail and met with many visiting
USG and Congressional delegations. He is not convinced that
the proposed project is in the best interests of the Czech
Republic or NATO. This explains in part Hamacek's emphasis
on a drawn out (or worst-case) timeline for parliamentary
consideration. While we may not be able to win Hamacek's
vote in support of MD, he will play a key role as chairman of
the Foreign Affairs Committee during the ratification;
furthermore, he will be an influential voice on foreign
policy matters in CSSD and the Czech Republic for many years
and could be an important counterweight to Zaoralek. We
therefore urge Washington agencies to help the Czech Embassy
in scheduling a good visit for Hamacek and his parliamentary
delegation in April.
Thompson-Jones